

Federal Funding Not Much Better

The Howard Government has not given Fraser Island a fair share of Federal funding. This year the Commonwealth Government provided funding in two parts. \$34,500.00 for the operation of the Fraser Island Committees (CAC, SAC, Management Committee) which has to be matched by the state. In addition this year it has provided \$662,500 from the National Heritage Fund (which is due to run out in 2001) for specific projects

The following are the projects approved by the Commonwealth for 1999-2000 announced in May doesn't coincide with the advisory committee priorities. Senator Hill refused to fund a very high committee priority — a Transport and Access Study:

\$300,000.00 Central Station campground
 \$106,500.00 new toilets at the start of the Wabby Lakes walking track, (not where FIDO wanted them)
 \$80,000.00 management of vehicle use (roadworks)
 \$50,000.00 Lake Allom foreshore works
 \$45,000.00 design for redeveloping the Lake McKenzie site in the future (to remove camping)
 \$45,000.00 replacement of Ungowa toilet. The committee saw (this as a very low priority).

\$662,500 may seem like a generous contribution until it is compared with what the Commonwealth Government contributed to other Australian World Heritage sites. With its \$662,500 in 1999-2000, Fraser Island received a mere 1.28% of the Commonwealth Government handouts for World Heritage sites. The full list Commonwealth allocations are as follows.

Sites managed wholly by the Commonwealth

Great Barrier Reef — \$24,200,000 (46.76% of the total Commonwealth World Heritage spending)
 Uluru - Kata Juta — \$3,980,000 (7.69%)
 Kakadu — \$10,590,000 (20.46%).

It is interesting to compare Kakadu with Fraser Island. Both were identified as potential World Heritage sites by Commonwealth Environmental Inquiries in 1975-76. Kakadu Stage 1 became a National Park in 1978. It was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1983 — 9 years before Fraser Island. As a result it started receiving funding for resource management more than a decade earlier than Fraser Island. Kakadu has a much more robust environment and is larger than Fraser Island but with slightly lower level of visitation. However with 20.46% of the Commonwealth World Heritage funding, Kakadu receives 16 times more than Fraser Island. It has more than twice the overall budget of Fraser Island.

Sites managed by Joint Agreement between State and Commonwealth Governments

Tasmanian Wilderness — \$5,730,000 (10.34%)
 Wet Tropics — \$3,852,500 (7.44%)

State managed sites with some Commonwealth Government financial contribution

Central Eastern Rainforest Reserves of Australia (CERRA) — \$785,000 (1.51%) involves both New South Wales and Queensland.
 Fraser Island — \$662,500 (1.28%)
 Lord Howe Island — \$453,000 (0.87%)
 Australia Fossil Mammal Sites (Naracoorte SA) — \$417,720 (0.81%)
 Australia Fossil Mammal Sites (Riversleigh Queensland) \$395,193 (0.76%)
 Shark Bay — \$450,250 (0.87%)
 Willandra Lakes — \$340,000 (0.66%)

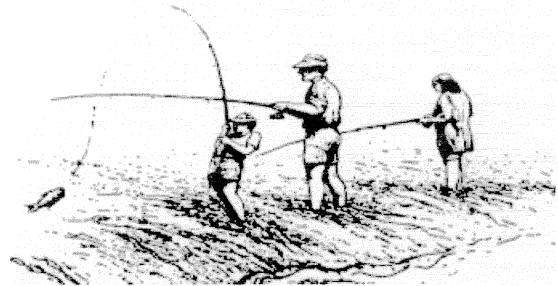
It is clear that World Heritage sites which have been nominated without a political brawl between the Commonwealth and respective State Governments have been short changed in subsequent Commonwealth allocations to assist the management of those sites. By whatever standard you adopt, Fraser Island has missed out.

The Federal Budget foreshadows a reduction in funding for World Heritage areas from \$15.7 million (which doesn't include the Great Barrier Reef, Kakadu and Uluru) to \$10 million by 2002.

One positive benefit from the Commonwealth Government is its newly proclaimed Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act) is discussed on p9 of this MOONBI.

Contributions by Other States

It appears that Fraser Island is the only site, which does not receive any contribution from general state revenue for management of the World Heritage sites. As MOONBI 98 was going to press, FIDO has not been able to obtain an analysis of each State's separate contribution to the particular World Heritage sites. FIDO is attempting to obtain this obscure data from New South Wales, Tasmania, South Australia and Western Australia
FIDO will be represented at the meeting of the World Heritage Committee which will be meeting in Cairns, Queensland from 23 November to 2 December, 2000.



Budget Anomalies

The decision to deny Fraser Island any consolidated revenue comes despite an increase of \$13 million in the budget for the Environmental Protection Agency and QPWS this year. Clearly some Queensland bureaucrats recommended making Fraser Island try to survive entirely off its own user pays revenue while dividing up the rest of the consolidated revenue cake amongst other Queensland National Parks.

The Queensland Budget announced on 20 July included some employment initiatives for the Wide Bay region. **\$100,000 for "Lake Allom camping area"**, though, hasn't subsequently been included in the proposed Fraser Island expenditure FIDO received on 12 September.

The Cooloola Section of the Great Sandy National Park fared much better in getting a share of consolidated revenue. \$330,000 was allocated for a visitor information centre at Tewantin and a further \$219,000 for further development of Harry's Hut Camp ground;

In Noosa National Park, in addition to meeting all expenses for park operations including ranger staff from consolidated revenue, the taxpayers will also provide an additional \$150,000 for walking tracks and \$86,000 to upgrade the park's Tea Tree Bay toilet block. That puts it about \$500,000 ahead of what Fraser Island has been advised it will receive from consolidated revenue.

The Economic Value of Fraser Island

The whale-watching industry is now estimated to be worth at least \$80 million to the Fraser Coast economy. It attracts 80,000 visitors a year, most of whom spend just an extra day or half day in Hervey Bay to see the whales.

Ten years ago Noosa National Park was estimated to generate an additional \$24 million annually for the regional economy and again it is adding only marginally to the mean length of the visitor stays in Noosa.

In addition to time spent on the island itself, Fraser Island adds over a million visitor days to the time visitors stay in the Fraser Coast Region. Based on the estimated economic values of other major natural areas such as the Wet Tropics, Kakadu, Noosa and Cooloola, FIDO conservatively estimates that Fraser Island contributes more than \$250 million to the state economy annually.

Local Government

All three levels of government abuse Fraser Island financially. FIDO cannot get any response from either the Maryborough or Hervey Bay City Councils over their pocketing of revenue collected on Fraser Island.

Nothing seems to have happened since we published the following statement in MOONBI 94:

The 1996 Local Government Boundaries Review said (p16) *"Hervey Bay City has a net excess revenue of \$122,000" for its portion of Fraser Island. This is "after allowing a pro-rata contribution to general administration" of 10%. In addition the portion of Fraser Island under Hervey Bay "attracts Financial Assistance Grants and Road Entitlement estimated to be some \$160,000 per annum."*

FIDO is very concerned particularly at the incredibly poor management of that part of Fraser Island in the Hervey Bay City Council jurisdiction. Three issues particularly concern us.

1. The Council has refused to implement the Development Control Plan, which was drafted at great public expense to be compatible with the Great Sandy Region Management Plan. The Council's "go-it-alone" policy has effectively thumbed its nose at its responsibilities under the Management Plan.
2. Hervey Bay Council has deliberately turned a blind eye to quite obvious breaches of its own zoning laws and building codes to sanction huge mansions on Fraser Island being built and then sub-let as multi-unit dwellings. This practice has allowed Orchid Beach to become a model of appalling planning.
3. Having neglected its responsibilities to control weeds and oversee proper planning for the northern half of the island, the Hervey Bay Council has now decided to draw up its own Coastal Management Plan. To date the drafts and Discussion Papers have effectively ignored the fact that more than three-quarters of the coastline of the City of Hervey Bay is located on Fraser Island. A huge amount of government money has already been granted to facilitate this planning process but it looks like Fraser Island is again going to be the Cinderella as Hervey Bay City moves to develop its own Coastal Management Plan. We suspect that this is to avoid adhering to the regional plan which takes in the coast from Noosa to Miriam Vale

Fire Management Under Way

MOONBI readers will be well aware of FIDO's growing agitation over the failure to develop and implement a Fire management Plan for Fraser Island. This was resulting in alarming ecological changes on the island which were threatening many of the island's World Heritage values.

On 21-23 August the QPWS hosted a very comprehensive Fire Management Workshop at Hervey Bay involving more than 30 community, scientific and ranger staff representatives who, with the guidance and input of a number of experts, explored and discussed the options for the best fire management regime on Fraser Island.

It was encouraging to appreciate the strong consensus that more management burning was required particularly from the island ranger staff. The workshop identified all of the special island ecotypes and their special fire requirements. For example coastal casuarinas are very fire sensitive and may take years to recover on foredunes after severe fires so they need to be protected. On the other hand there is an invasion of casuarinas on Indian Head which is threatening a very specialized and rare grassland headland ecotype. It was agreed that there needs to be a management burn on Indian Head to reduce the casuarina invasion of that special ecotype. Appropriate fire regimes have similarly been identified for the whole island.

We now await the final outcome which should appear in the form of a draft plan. However, at the speed that several plans on Fraser Island are progressing at it may be years before that occurs.

In the meantime the Rangers have already been busy conducting management burns within the constraints of their very limited resources. In so doing (and they have made more progress this year than they have done for several years) they are building up a better understanding of the science and ecology of fire for Fraser Island.

One Got Away: One management burn at Sandy Cape escaped this year but because this area had been burnt two years ago with by a very benign wildfire, this fire was much more benign than it may have otherwise been. FIDO thinks it is inevitable that there will be some mistakes as the skills to better understand and manage fire in this environment are developed. One can learn from mistakes, but if nothing is done, nothing is learnt.



World Class Interpretation on Fraser

MOONBI would like to give the QPWS another bouquet to for the excellence of the interpretive signage. This now causing more visitors to be better informed about the issues and to appreciate the island more. John Sinclair, who explored National Park management in Utah in July, and who annually visits most leading National Parks in Australia says the interpretive signs are exceptionally good and could be judged world class. FIDO would like to express particular appreciation to Sue Olsen for her work in producing the excellent signs and brochures. The establishment of tour operators workshops (such as are conducted at Kakadu) and more Ranger guided activities of the quality offered in American National Parks would provide Fraser Island the very top quality interpretation.

Changing Patterns of Recreation

In this issue of MOONBI we examine several aspects of changing recreation patterns on Fraser Island. There have been several changes over recent years which have occurred but seem to have been almost unnoticed and unremarked on although the implications for both management and stakeholders are enormous especially if the trends continue. These relate to (1) the number of visitors, (2) the declining FIT 4WD numbers, (3) the increasing number of walkers using the Great Walk and (4) the proportion of visitors seeking softer options.

Table: 1
Fraser Island Recreation Area Statistics

Year	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	%
Camping						
Number permits	23,770	25,209	N/A	26,616	23,395	98.4
Number of campers	143,523	118,461	118,916	104,466	106,950	74.5
Number camper nights	331,695	338,088	320,974	292,505	311,401	93.9
(camping) visit days	437,363	N/A	77,991	396,971	418,351	
Commercial activity permits						
Number people carried—total	157,697	184,089	217,824	174,429	174,619	110.7
Film/photography	60	10	15	29	1	
Vehicle service permit						
– one month	38,957	41,277	40,328	35,078	29,507	75.7
– annual	29	61	48	66	30	
– exemption	N/A	849	668	376	532	

Source: Annual Reports of Environmental Protection Agency — Reports of Recreation Areas Management Board

Notes: There continues to be a steady upwards trend in the numbers of people carried on commercial tours on Fraser Island (Up 10.7% over four years) while the number of Free and Independent Travellers (F.I.T.s) is down, the numbers of campers (down 25.5%) and the number of vehicle permits issued (down 24.3%). This requires a review of the factors because such shifts in the patterns of recreation have very important implications for Fraser Island overall management.

The Decline of FIT Visitation

The most dramatic decline in the number of FITs to Fraser Island occurred between 2002/03 and 2004/05 when the number of one month vehicle permits plunged by 28.9% in just two years. All vehicles visiting the island other than residents or workers (who must still obtain an exemption permit) must buy a permit of either one month (a single visit) or an annual permit. In 2002-03 there were 40,328 single vehicle permits issued, in 2003-04 there were 35,078 and in the last financial year there were just 29,507 permits issued. This represents a decline of more than 25% in just two years. That is very significant and needs much closer examination.

While nobody has conclusively identified the reasons for the decline there are a number of factors. These include:

* **Costs:** The first and foremost is cost. Coincidental with a sharp rise in fuel costs has been an increasing cost of ferry fares. Most of the FIT traffic enters Fraser Island between Inskip Point and Hook Point. It was only a few years ago these same ferry services were running at a much lower price (In some cases a seventh of the price) than today (see story p3). The 25% decline in vehicle traffic immediately follows the abandonment of cheap ferry fares.

The trend in growth of visitation to almost all major natural destinations in Australia has slowed down in the last decade as tourists are increasingly seeking softer options. Some destinations such as Kakadu have had declining visitor numbers for much longer than Fraser Island.

* **Softness:** There is an increasing softness amongst Australians who want more creature comforts and are abandoning the “roughing it” type recreation. (See p6.)

* **Salt Sensitive:** Ironically, despite the increasing proportion of 4WDs in the Australian motor vehicle fleet, many are in the luxury class and owners are increasingly reluctant to expose their expensive vehicles to salt and sand and are determinedly keeping their precious vehicles off the beaches.



The old McKenzie locomotive which operated on Fraser Island from 1918 until the mid-1930s. When the McKenzie sawmill shut down the Fraser Island light rail was taken over and operated by the Queensland Forestry Department until the mid 1930s.

Seeking Softer Options

The number of campers on Fraser Island and the number of camper nights plateaued some years ago and has remained relatively stable since. However this doesn't tell the full story. The number of Australian campers appears to have declined significantly but the coincidental growth of international backpacker visitors has helped maintain the overall number of campers.

Of the Australian campers who are visiting Fraser Island and Cooloola, most are having much more elaborate camps. For example, the proportion of caravans appearing is ever increasing. Amongst the tent campers, more people are sleeping on beds or stretchers rather than thin mattresses separating them from the ground. There are more electric generators and electrical appliances appearing in camps and the trend can be observed in many facets of camping.

Despite the greater range of creature comforts used in camping, an increasing proportion of Fraser Island visitors are opting for hotel, resorts and an ever-higher standard of housing. The trend is not limited to Fraser Island. All around the Australian coast, the traditional beach holiday shacks are being upgraded or being replaced by "McMansions". In the past, holiday accommodation was often inferior to the standard of accommodation at home. Now an increasing proportion of the market demands more elaborate accommodation for their holidays than they have at home. The contrast between the houses erected in the 1960s at Eurong and Happy Valley contrasts with the housing erected in the 1990s and more recently at Orchid Beach.



The Great Walkers

Going against the above trend are the Great Walkers. It is clear that, while starting from a small base, the number of people who are hiking rather than driving around the island is escalating at a very rapid rate. Recent interviews of walkers using the Great Walk, which is now gaining an international reputation, indicate how the word about the quality of the experience is rapidly spreading. One walker from England said that she learnt about the walk by searching the internet for a suitable destination for a walking holiday. She had wanted to visit Fraser Island but not to ride around it in a 4WD. She flew to Australia specifically to walk the length of the trail. Two Germans who said that they had previously walked Tasmania's "Overland Track" and were keen to do it again also heard about Fraser Island's Great Walk and decided to add the walk to their itinerary for their Australian visit last October. More significantly was the encounter with a group of five Aussies from Sydney's North Shore. They had flown up from Sydney on the newly established direct flights to Hervey Bay, travelled across to Kingfisher Resort and were hiking to Dilli Villi. They said that it was hard to pick up any bushwalking magazine which didn't feature Fraser Island's Great Walk. They were determined to get in before the walk became more popular because they said that many walkers in Sydney were now placing it on their agenda.

All of this supports the latent demand amongst younger people identified last year by Tamara Jacobi which was reported in MOONBI 110. She investigated the expectations of 283 backpackers and what they wanted. She concluded, "Responses of backpacker surveys indicated many different problems with four wheel drive tours. The majority of backpackers, both male and female, and of many different nationalities, expressed a significant interest in hiking on Fraser Island as well as an interest in supported hikes on the island. Only 3 backpackers of the 283 surveyed had even read about hiking on Fraser Island ... this lack of awareness was not from lack of interest. When asked if they would be interested in hiking on Fraser nearly 70% of backpackers said 'Yes' they would be interested."



Two Picnics from the McKenzie Era (1918-1925)

Both photos were provided to FIDO by a former McKenzie Sawmill employee and are now part of the FIDO photographic archives, copies of which have also been donated by FIDO to the QPWS and the Oxley Memorial Library. **Above:** This was obviously taken around the company base at North White Cliffs near Jetty and sawmill. **Below:** This is a picnic on the foredunes of Fraser Island's Ocean side. Even here the foredunes had a grassy understorey until the 1970s.



ALLIES WORKING ON WEEDS

The Fraser Island Weeds Alliance was established during a workshop in December was a result of an initiative by the Burnett Mary Regional Group which brought together all stakeholders. FIDO was interested to learn of some of the other groups working on Fraser Island such as the Friends of the Sandy Cape Lighthouse. This group has been quietly tackling one of Fraser Island's other major centres of weed infestation, but within the Great Sandy National Park. The Butchalla people are also keen to help eliminate virulent weeds also introduced through 19th paternalism to the site of the old Bogimbah Mission.

Table 1
Fraser Island Visitor Number Trends

	Total FITs	Total CTOs	Total
1992-93	111,199	127,775	239,974
1993-94	120,323	136,860	257,184
1994-95	122,797	141,434	264,231
1995-96	128,434	138,299	266,733
1996-97	130,163	143,459	273,622
1997-98	138,574	152,830	291,404
1978-99	135,763	161,585	297,621
1999-00	135,667	178,384	314,051
2000-01	150,765	180,887	331,652
<i>The following figures are for calendar years</i>			
2002	153,847	199,424	353,271
<i>To this stage Visitor numbers were growing</i>			
2003	152,536	185,551	338,087
2004	132,706	167,802	300,508
2005	123,670	174,057	297,727

Source: QPWS Reports .

FITs = Free Independent Travellers

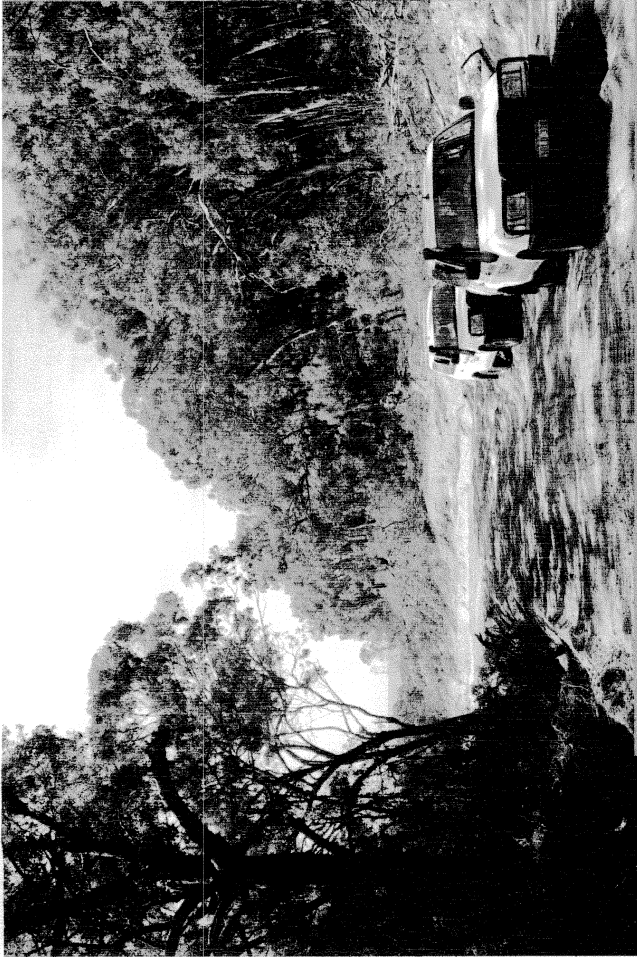
CTOs = Visitors carried by Commercial Tour Operators .

Discussion: Commercial tourism now carries 58% of all Fraser Island. Numbers on commercial tours continue to increase as a proportion of total visitor numbers.

In the 3 years from 2002 total visitor numbers declined by 16% but the rate of decline of FITs declined by 21% while the decline of visitors carried on commercial tours declined by 13%

**World Heritage Area Projects
Fraser Island World Heritage Area
Commonwealth Component**
For period 1996-07 to 2005-06

C'wealth ID Number	Project Title	Fin Yr											Grand Total		
		1996-97	1997-98	1998-99	1999-2000	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006				
26907	Analysis of key tourism impacts and threat to values (partial funding)	20,000													20,000
26908	Establishment of a Plant Nursery	86,230													86,230
26909	Interpretation display	51,500													51,500
26910	Interpretive planning and delivery at Central Station	23,000													23,000
26911	Management of Vehicle Use	318,721													318,721
26912	Rehabilitation of high use degraded areas	69,600													69,600
26913	Upgrade of walking tracks	59,449													59,449
26915	Waddy Point Beach Toilet	71,500													71,500
26992	baseline funding		15,000												15,000
26993	Management of Vehicle Use		171,410												171,410
26994	Upgrading of Walking Tracks		128,590												128,590
26996	Presentation of World Heritage - interpretation and Public Contact		140,000												140,000
26998	Lake Garawongera - Redevelopment of Visitor Facilities		160,000												160,000
26999	Wangoolba Creek Toilet Facilities		111,000												111,000
27000	Indian Head Visitor Access Facilities		224,000												224,000
27157	Base line funding			20,000											20,000
27160	Monitoring World Heritage attributes of Fraser Island			50,000											50,000
27664	Fraser Island - Lake Allom foreshore works facility design				46,500										46,500
27668	Fraser Island - Construction of Toilet at Ungowa campground				50,000										50,000
27669	Fraser Island - Construction of Toilet at Wabby track entrance (Fraser Island)				45,000										45,000
27670	Construction of toilets at Lake Wabby track entrance (Fraser Island)				106,500										106,500
27671	Fraser Island - Management of Vehicle Use				80,000										80,000
27672	Fraser Island - Central Station campground development				300,000										300,000
27682	Base Funding for Fraser Island World Heritage Area Committees				34,500										34,500
29227	Fraser Island World Heritage Area Construction of toilets at Lake Allom					110,000									110,000
29228	Fraser Island World Heritage Area Second Ablution Block, Dundabara Campground					160,000									160,000
29229	Eli Creek Boardwalk Reconstruction					200,000									200,000
29230	Fraser Island World Heritage Area Base Funding for Fraser Island World Heritage Area Committees					36,000									36,000
36216	Base Funding for Committees						40,000								40,000
36218	Redevelopment and Upgrade of Eli Creek Boardwalk						250,000								250,000
36219	Central Station Campground Development						140,000								140,000
36220	Construction of Sediment Traps to Prevent Sediment Entering Lakes and Streams						60,000								60,000
36221	Lake Wabby Lookout Carpark Redevelopment and Toilet Construction						130,000								130,000
36222	Management of Vehicle Use						80,000								80,000
44787	Community Advisory Committee & Scientific Advisory Committee							30,000							30,000
44788	Community and Scientific Advisory Committees							27,000							27,000
50074	Executive Officer (part time)							15,500							15,500
50075	Executive Officer (part time)							17,000							17,000
50075	Indigenous Advisory Committee (IAC) feasibility study							10,000							10,000
50075	WHA Signage and Information							70,000							70,000
50075	Fraser Island Committee funding							8,000							8,000
Grand Total		700,000	950,000	70,000	662,500	506,000	700,000	42,500	127,000	67,000	8,000	8,000	8,000	8,000	3,833,000



In 2006 the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service transformed 80 ha of Fraser Island to bare earth. More than another 100 kilometres are proposed to complement this 40 km long firebreak. Mining and logging ceased on Fraser Island in 1976 and 1991 but massive devastation continues.

